
VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGN – UPDATE

Introduction

At its meeting on 22nd May 2023, the Committee raised queries about the suitability of the Vehicle Activated Sign supplied for use in Cranbrook and requested an evaluation of the deployment and management of the Vehicle Activated Sign over a period of six months. Minute A/23/36 refers. This report provides an overview of the equipment's deployment; its suitability and a sample of the data obtained.

Background

In recent years, Highways Authorities have experimented with various types of signs in which approaching vehicles trigger an electronic display providing a warning message. These have evolved broadly into two main types of speed warning signs; namely the Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) which displays the speed limit when the approaching car exceeds the limit and the Speed Indicator Device (SID) which displays the speed of approaching vehicles.

Permanent VAS's are sited according to the Department of Transport guidance only at locations with a history of road casualty collisions and mobile speed warning signs can be used at sites where speed is a concern even though there may not be a history of collisions or incidents. It is worth noting that research suggests that their effectiveness reduces over time, with little or no speed reduction after about two weeks at any one location.

The Town Council received approval from Devon County Highways Authority and received County Council Community Grant Funding for the purchase of a battery operated Vehicle Activated Sign to be sited at either of two approved locations within Cranbrook. The sites being Younghayes Road and Tillhouse Road.

Deployment of Vehicle Activated Sign Equipment

At its meeting of 26th June 2023, the Council approved the appointment of Pro Lawn Garden Services (PLG) as a suitably qualified contractor to manage and deploy the Vehicle Activated Sign on behalf of the Town Council.

PLG Services deploy the equipment at either of the two approved sites, based upon an agreed schedule:

YH1 – Younghayes Road facing towards the Co-Op store

YH2 - Younghayes Road facing towards Copse Close Lane

TH1 – Tillhouse Road facing towards Younghayes Road

TH2 - Tillhouse Road facing towards the Town Centre

The equipment remains in position for a fortnight at the end of which, is either turned to face the opposite direction or moved to the other site to commence the next four weeks at the second location.

In essence, the equipment moves between the two sites on a monthly basis. Following each deployment and prior to its change (either direction or location) the Council receives a data

downloaded to bespoke software provided by the manufacturer.

Data from Vehicle Activated Sign

Please see summary data annexed to the report.

Evaluation and Associated Costs

To date the service provided by PLG has been reliable and required very little interaction based upon the use of the schedule to ensure that equipment is moved in line with expectation. There has been one exception where the equipment was moved a week in advance of the schedule and this was resolved by retaining the pattern of deployment and noting the new dates for changeover.

PLG requested an alternative battery (solar powered) as it would be lighter to operate and lift into position as part of the deployment. The Committee requested that an evaluation of the existing equipment take place in the first instance. PLG have not reported any performance issues with the existing batteries and agreed to adjust the height of the retaining clips on the posts to accommodate lifting the heavier battery at height. This was only a small adjustment and has not affected the VAS data collection or been subject to tampering or vandalism.

As part of the evaluation, information was sought on the benefits of switching to the alternative solar batteries. This would require the VAS equipment to be returned to the manufacturer, Westcotec for modification. The cost of making the alteration to the VAS, together with the supply of two new batteries and solar panels was estimated to be £700 plus VAT and may not be considered value for money.

Whilst the purchase of the equipment was fully funded by virtue of Devon County Council, Community Fund, the Town Council is responsible for the ongoing costs of maintenance and for the insurance associated with operating the equipment. Therefore, the Council is responsible for the cost to maintain, repair if vandalised or another similar occurrence that would prevent its use.

The fees associated with the deployment are £50.00 plus VAT and include PLG's retention of the spare battery to recharge upon redeployment of the equipment and to provide data downloads from each site on a fortnightly basis. On this basis, the Council would be charged £1,300.00 plus VAT per year, based upon £50.00 plus VAT per fortnight.

Overall, the Vehicle Activated Sign is working better than initially anticipated. There have been no concerns raised by the contractor about battery life or deployment in the town. The VAS provides an appropriate visual deterrent to excessive speeding as a reminder to motorists driving through Cranbrook to remain within the speed limit.

The operation and deployment is equally working well with little disruption to the scheduled pattern. The data downloaded has given assurance that there are no emerging speeding issues in Cranbrook and as the accumulation of data builds it will allow further analysis to identify trends and patterns over time.

Recommendation

1. To note the report.
2. To conclude that the Vehicle Activated Sign as provided, works well and is approved for use in Cranbrook.
3. To continue with the current arrangements for the deployment and management of the Vehicle Activated Sign in Cranbrook, including PLG services as the appointed contractor.
4. To receive regular updates on the data captured by the Vehicle Activated Sign.